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PIONEER SERIES--No. 12

Alexander M. Mackay
OF UGANDA, AFRICA

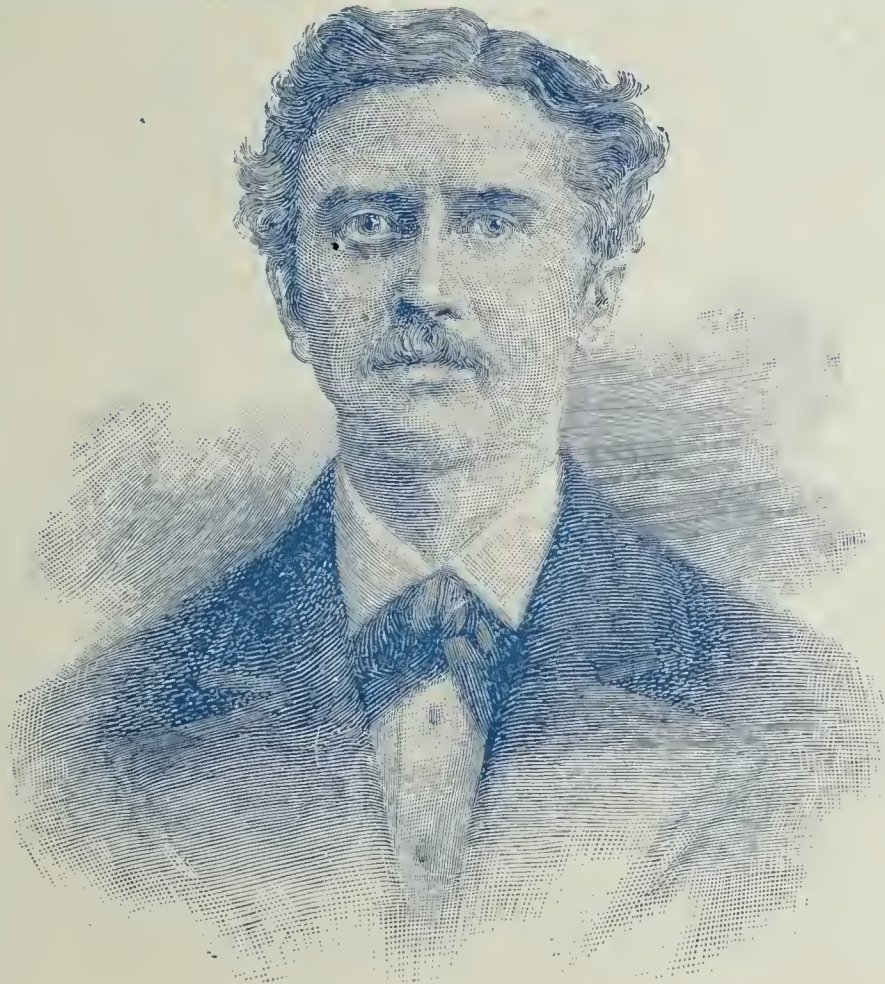
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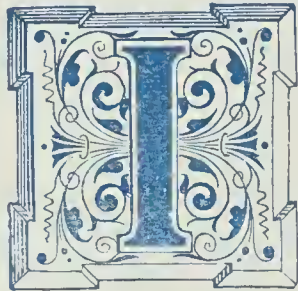
WOMAN'S FOREIGN MISSIONARY SOCIETY
OF THE
METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
36 BROMFIELD STREET
BOSTON

ALEXANDER M. MACKAY.





MACKAY OF UGANDA



T was a cold day, that 13th of October, in the village of Rhynie, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, and the outdoor world was bleak and desolate. But the minister's study was cosy, and that good man, by nature and grace a scholar, was content with his books.

Not quite, however, for he left his reading to hang a map of Africa beside the window. A queer map it was, divided by a "caterpillar line" labeled "Mountain of the Moon." But it was of special interest now, for had not a Scotchman named Livingstone begun wonderful explorations the previous August? But the maid, "Minister's Annie," opened the door and broke the silence with, "I've brocht ye a present, sir."

But, only conscious of a listener, he began, "Do you see this pear-shaped continent, Annie?" Then, enlarging his theme, he finally said, "The Gospel banner will yet be planted at the very heart of this continent, although not likely in your day or mine, Annie."

"But maybe it'll be in your son's, sir, and wha will say he'll nae hae a han' in it?"

Suddenly perceiving that she was holding an infant, he exclaimed, "A boy! bring him near the window and let me see him."

In greeting his young son his eye fell upon the picture of a great reformer and he said, "May he be another John Knox, Annie!" But she replied, "Na! he is nae gaen to be a John Knox; he'll gang his ain gait and jest be himsel', jest Alexander Mackay!"

Thus introduced to the world as his father's namesake, he early became both companion and pupil. At three he could read the New Testament fluently, at seven his text-books were "Paradise Lost" and standard histories. From his father he "received a vast amount of information on all sorts of subjects."

At twelve he turned his attention to machinery. While at school in Aberdeen he gained admission to large shipping-yards,—greatly to his advantage in after years. That year his mother, a saintly woman, died; leaving him her Bible with the admonition to "search it," which he faithfully heeded. In 1867 the family removed to Edinburgh, and he entered the Free Church Training College for Teachers. But he had determined to be an engineer, and in Germany perfected himself for this work, and decided to be "an engineering missionary."

In 1875 he wrote to the Church Missionary Society, "My heart burns for the deliverance of Africa, and if you can send me to any one of those regions which Livingstone and Stanley have found to be groaning under the curse of the slave-hunter, I shall be very glad."

April 27, 1876, full of splendid plans, Mackay started for Africa;—his

final destination being Uganda, on the shores of Victoria Nyanza, to which Stanley had directed the world's attention.

The first work the Society gave him was road-making; and for a year he fought his way through thorny jungles and dense forests, where

“At night he heard the lion roar and the hyena scream,
And the riverhorse as he crushed the reeds beside some hidden stream.”

But a road meant regular mails and greater safety for missionaries, so the young hero said, “Somebody must do this work, and why not I?”

At the year's end he saw a new station at Mpwapwa, and a road leading to the coast, a distance of two hundred and thirty miles!

Mackay was next instructed to try the “bullock-wagon system,” instead of using natives as burden-bearers. This meant another year of terrible experience. The total depravity of animate and inanimate things conspired to test him, but his invincible courage bore the strain. He saw the slave-caravans,—heard the clink of their chains and the piteous wails of those left behind, and pledged himself to help “heal this open sore of the world.”

On Sundays, Mackay instructed the natives in spiritual things, but says, “Their dark minds can only grasp a little at a time, all is so new to them.” Early in November, 1878, the “Engineering missionary,” who had surely won the title, reached Uganda.

King Mtesa granted an interview. Through a double row of guards Mackay advanced to the “palace,” where the king, seated on a mat, dressed

in a long white robe and long black coat, richly embroidered, greeted him. This friendly reception, with gifts and a little talk, introduced him to his new work. And at this time he was the only one of the original party of eight to enter King Mtesa's realm,—a rare chance to “jest be himsel’, jest Alexander Mackay.”

Uganda lies directly under the equator, and is a comparatively healthy location. It is now a British Protectorate. The people are intelligent, and have long been ruled by kings of the Abyssinian type. The ruling caste call themselves Bahuma, but the tribe name is Baganda. Their traditions point to a far-back Golden Age. Mtesa had asked Stanley to send Christian teachers, but his ambition was to learn their ways and profit by their skill rather than to learn righteousness. He was vain, self-indulgent, cruel and capricious,—convinced of the truth of Christianity but opposed to its demands. To win him and his people to Christ was Mackay's paramount desire. Every Sunday the flag was raised on “Palace Hill” and he held service, explaining the Gospel and inviting questions. Great eagerness was shown by king and subjects to learn “the Book.” Sometimes Mtesa would exclaim, “Isa (Jesus), was there ever any one like him?”

But Mackay's strongest influence came through his mechanical skill. “Work is only fit for slaves in Uganda,” was their theory, but the ability of this master-workman won their admiration, and they said “Mackay is the great spirit!” His belief that “an idle life can never be a Christian one,” guided him in all his dealings with the undeveloped nation, and taught the

dignity of labor where it had never been suspected. He called himself "engineer, builder, printer, physician, surgeon and general artificer to Mtesa." The king ordered all workers in wood and iron to go to him, and such was his charm of person and character that he never lacked a voluntary following of boys. Workshop and house were "inundated" with them. Like all pioneers, translating and printing soon produced alphabet and textbook for these eager boys, "who learned to read in two months."

The Society sent several recruits during those first years in Uganda, but no one could fill his place, for the king never forgot that it was for his interest to keep the man who could "do everything."

But before the mission was firmly established, Roman Catholic priests came, who tried to win the king from Protestant teaching. Later came Mohammedans, and Mtesa the vacillating said, "Every nation of white men has another religion, how can I know what is right and what is false?"

In all discussions arising from these invasions, and even when Mtesa turned to witchcraft, Mackay was the uncompromising adviser. He condemned slavery, intemperance, witchcraft, raids for robbery, and the sins of the king with the faithfulness of an Elijah.

In 1882 the missionary finished his house, the first in that region, and "everybody" went to see it. Windows, doors, locks, stairs,—such things had never been imagined! He also made an oven, a brick-kiln, a steam saw-mill, and a cart which he painted a brilliant red and blue. After train-

ing a pair of bullocks to draw it he took his first ride, a crowd following until he "had a roaring retinue a thousand strong."

He taught the people to make roads, bridges and viaducts, to use sanitary measures in huts and villages, and to "stamp out" some of the most fatal diseases. In March, 1882, his first converts—five boys—were baptized, one minister now being in the mission.

In his note-book Mackay wrote, "May they be indeed the seed of Thy church in this land."

Two years later Mtesa died, and his son Mwanga became king. Persecution soon followed, and three devoted young Christians were burned—singing praises to the end. Mackay wrote, "Our hearts are breaking. All our Christians are dispersed." But the heroic pioneer could not stop for tears. He was printing the gospels while new converts flocked to the mission-house at night and many were baptized. He went to the young king with reproof and pleadings, but in vain. Soon came the crushing news of the murder of Bishop Hannington and his party by Baganda raiders. His goods were brought to the capital, and Mwanga dressed himself in the Bishop's robes!

But while Christians were hiding, expecting death, their number multiplied until two hundred and twenty-seven names were on the baptismal register. Mackay wrote, "Praise God! St. Matthew's Gospel is now published in Luganda," but adds, "I am almost broken down with fatigue, anxiety and want of sleep." How could it be otherwise, when the very flower of their

church—thirty-two at one time—had been martyred? The head executioner reported to the king that he had “never killed such brave people before, that they died calling on God.” This caused Mwanga to laugh, and say, “But God did not deliver them from the fire!” But from their ashes sprang a harvest of souls!

So bitter, however, was the feeling against Mackay on the part of Arabs who had gained control of the young king, that it was wise for him to leave temporarily, and he went to the lake, in 1887, Rev. E. C. Gordon taking his place. At Usambiro he founded a new station, and many persecuted Uganda Christians joined him. Here, too, came Stanley and his party, giving twenty days of joy. They urged him to return with them, but he would not until reinforcements arrived. So he worked on, gladdened eventually by news of peace in Uganda, assuring his early return. But this was not to be. In February, 1890, “All was still within the little stockade, save for the silent footsteps of his Baganda pupils, flitting in and out with awestricken faces.” Four days of fever and delirium, and on the 8th, Alexander Mackay entered into the joy of his Lord.

To-day in the Uganda region are more than a thousand churches, and one hundred thousand Christians. The splendid stability of this “miracle of missions” is largely due to the young man who gave his life to its founding.